EDUCATIONAL SERVICES IN SELECTED PUBLIC AND PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES, UGANDA: CROSS-BORDER STUDENTS’ EXPECTATIONS

ANUMAKA, I. B¹, TINDI SEJE² & FAZW MULUMBA³

¹Senior Lecturer CHDR KIU, Uganda
²Lecturer, College of Higher Degree & Research, KIU, Uganda

ABSTRACT

This study delved into establishing the levels of educational services in selected public and private universities in Uganda. The ex-post facto and descriptive comparative designs were employed. A total of 775 questionnaires were used for analysis. It was found out that all most all cross-border students (CBS) were satisfied with the quality of teaching and research. However, they were dissatisfied with the level of universities’ engagement in community services. Based on the study it was concluded that the level of educational services was generally satisfactory. The study also found that Parsuraman et al, (1985) Service Quality Model was valid since gaps existed between what students expected and what they realized. The major recommendations from the study were that universities should disseminate their research findings to community, establish an ongoing community service scheme, offer free professional consultancy services to the nearby community and strategically review these core functions.

KEYWORDS: Cross-Border Students, Educational Services, Quality of Teaching, Community Services

INTRODUCTION

With students and programs moving across borders with increasing ease, a pressing need has emerged for common reference points. The comparability of educational qualifications has become a key issue in international discussions. As greater mobility is both inevitable and generally considered desirable, international agreements that encourage the mutual recognition of programs and credentials have become more significant. At a practical level, this policy means finding a way to define and validate the level and quality of post secondary qualifications for individuals who reside and/or work in a country other than where their education was completed (Altbach, et al, 2009).

The growth in importance of educational services has been influenced greatly by the changing nature of the world economies and the customers’ changing needs, tastes and preferences. The move has also been fueled by the growth in consumerism, world travel (across borders) and the competitive business environments. Therefore, service quality has become a critical factor in enabling institutions to achieve a differential advantage over their competitors and thus, it makes it a significant contribution to profitability and productivity (Sanchez, et. al, 2007).

Universities are acclaimed as among the most successful organizations of our time (Hernes, 2005). The extensive growth in university education is argued as a major confirmation of this success. This development has expanded across borders and continents, and in 2004 the number of students enrolled in universities exceeded 100 million (Hernes, 2005). This growth has fashioned a description of university education as the “industry” with the largest economic growth (Mathisen, 2006) and it describes a sector that had an export turnover estimated to USD 30 billion in 1998 (Larsen and Vincent-Lancrin, 2002).

In Uganda, as highlighted by Sichmerman (2005) and Ssekamwa (1988) cited in Kyaligonza (2009) noted that Makerere College was part of the University of East Africa until its dissolution in 1970 into Makerere University,
University of Dar-es-Salam and University of Nairobi. Other public and private universities which emerged in later years included Mbarara University of Science and Technology (1989), Namasagali University (1991), Uganda Martyrs University Nkozi (1993), Nkumba University (1996), Bugema University (1997), Uganda Christian University Mukono (1997), Ndejje University (1998), Kampala University (1999), Kyambogo University. (2000), Kampala International University (2001), Gulu University, (2003), Busitema University of Technology (2006) and St. Lawrence University (2006), most if not all of these universities admit students from different countries.

Traditionally, higher education in Uganda engages in three principal functions of teaching, research and public service. According to Kampala International University Strategic Plan (2008/2009 – 2012/2013), teaching develops the intellectual capacities of individuals to enable them understand and appreciate their environment. In line with this, tertiary education institutions in Uganda seek to pursue the goals, which according to Government White Paper (1992), include: training high level technical, managerial and professional personnel for all sectors of national life generating advanced knowledge and innovations through research and to be able to translate or adapt them to local and Ugandan situations; intensify the provision of community service through expanded extra-mural or extension work and consultancy services (NCHE, 1992).

Today, many universities are being driven towards commercial competition imposed by environmental challenges. Tertiary institutions, in general, need to be concerned not only with what the society values in the skills and abilities of their graduates, but also how their students feel about their educational experience (Bemowski, 1991). A survey conducted by Owlia and Aspinwall (1997) examined the views of their different professionals and practitioners on the quality in higher education. They concluded that customer-orientation in higher education is a generally an acceptable principle.

Cox (2006) and Barne (1990) sighted in Knight (2005) have noted that universities emerged out of a need for junior and older scholars to search for knowledge, identify a forum for testing out their theories and ideas. University education is geared towards serving as power houses and think tanks for the continuous advancement of knowledge, generation of innovative ideas, development of the minds of the young and the old through engagement in challenging intellectual work and continuous engagement in issues concerning the survival of humanity. Albeit the university education is expanding in all directions, by expanding enrollments, expanding cross-border education, expanding university subsidiaries abroad, and expanding education via the web, the demand for not only education- but also certified and quality education increases. The demands are directed towards ensuring that students get value for money from university education, in order to remain internationally transferable and valid (Hernes, 2005).

Universities in Uganda are faced with increasing challenges in regard to their core functions of teaching, research and community services. A survey of universities by National Council for Higher Education (NCHE) in 2004 and the data collected from Higher Education Institutions (HEI) in 2005 indicated that the quality of higher education delivery in Uganda is declining rapidly (NCHE, 2005). In many institutions, it has been observed that staff qualifications, research and experience are declining (Kasozi, 2003; Lejeune, 2006). Mamdani (2012) noted that the rise in student admissions has doubled but the teaching staff and physical facilities have not caught up with the pace, there are no more tutorials, research work is not adequately supervised, community services are scanty and almost all activities have been monetized.

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

Educational services of any university may be gauged in accordance with the expectations of students who consume the service (Ching-Yaw, Phyr and Keomony, 2007). Student’s expectations are used in this study because they indicate an evaluation of service quality in terms of value judgments held by the consumers of these services. They therefore reveal the extent to which a university’s academic capacity is able to support the delivery of educational services.
as promised and as dependably and accurately as expected. Considering university as a provider of various services, Douglas, Douglas, and Barnes (2006) emphasized the importance of teaching service for students, while acknowledged “teaching” as a core service provided at a university. Yeo (2008) went on a step further by studying the role of a student as customer or as product underlining the importance of former role. Students being primary customers in higher education contribute in the process of service providing which distinguishes service delivery from product manufacturing.

The quality of education is directly related to the quality of instruction in the classroom. It is a fact that the academic qualifications, knowledge of the subject matter, competence, and skills of teaching and the commitment of the teacher have effective impact on the teaching process. Quality improvement in education depends upon proper training of teachers. The teachers cannot play any of the roles unless properly trained. The latest visitation committee report all regrets that most lecturers in universities are still using old and traditional teaching methods — talk and chalk method of giving lectures. The methods are more teachers than student-based, and they tend to develop students’ memorization rather than their analytical and problem solving skills. About 70% of the courses at Makerere University today, are still being taught using blackboards. A survey by the Department of ICT in Makerere shows that 713 courses (69.5%) are still being taught with lecturers depending on printed materials, with little ICT integration NCHE (2010).

The expansion of higher education was accompanied by a diversification of providers. New institution types emerged, educational offerings within institutions multiplied, private provision expanded, and new modes of delivery were introduced (OECD, 2010). Institutions might support quality of teaching as a vehicle for recognition at national or global level. Some remote institutions located far from research-intensive areas or overshadowed by reputed universities, newly created institutions or innovative institutions (with Cross-Border Students), are eager to demonstrate that they deserve to be as regular and trustworthy providers of higher education.

Higher education has become much more diversified, encompassing new types of institutions and composition of different students from different countries. These have been created for a number of reasons: to develop a closer relationship between tertiary education and the external world, including greater responsiveness to labor market needs; to enhance social and geographical access to tertiary education; to provide high-level occupational preparation in a more applied and less theoretical way; and to accommodate the growing diversity of qualifications and expectations of school graduates (OECD, 2010), which requires highly qualified staff.

Higher education institutions are now involved in a wider range of teaching than their traditional degree-level courses. Some higher education institutions offer adult education and leisure courses, upper secondary courses to prepare students for tertiary-level study, and short specific occupational preparation at sub-degree level (OECD, 2010). The nature of some programs is likely to lead to further consideration of quality of teaching, especially in private universities who are greatly driven by competition. Institutions, especially multidisciplinary and research-intensive universities, have paid growing attention to quality of teaching when emphasizing the vocational qualifications of their programs. European universities like the Free University of Berlin have been influenced by the Bologna process and align programs with the economic environment. A lot of multi-faculty universities have further refined their programs to reinforce the multidisciplinary nature of education paths. Transversal education is not the sum of different curricula, but instead calls upon teachers to use new methods, collaborative work and new types of student assessments.

As regards research, the Report of the Visitation Committee to Ugandan Public Universities (NCHE 2010) emphasized that one of the primary functions of universities is to create and produce knowledge through research and to disseminate knowledge through publications (in peer - reviewed books and articles in scholarly journals). The second major function of reputable universities is to teach undergraduate and postgraduate programs through research. Thirdly, public universities are expected to spearhead, set and regularly review the national agenda. The pursuit for research in the
university can be basic, strategic, applied or experimental. The report further asserted that "a university that does not carry out researches is indistinguishable from a high school and is condemned to intellectual and academic obscurity".

With the on-going digital revolution and the emergence of knowledge economies, research in universities and elsewhere has assumed more importance than ever before. The report concluded that given the centrality of research in the age of globalization and digital revolution, the nation’s universities cannot afford to become mere teaching colleges consuming knowledge produced in other higher educational institutions around the world. It recommended that Ugandan universities must join in competitive research to serve their purpose, justify their existence and build their national and international reputations.

Kyaligonza (2009) cited Sutherland’s (2003) report that the decline of research in public higher education institutions in Uganda started in 1971 when General Idi Amin plunged Uganda into a dictatorship, economic ruin and degradation. The Asians who controlled the economy were expelled in 1972 and the British, the Americans and other core cadre researchers in Makerere Universities and other tertiary institutions were forced to leave the country. This led to the decline of research activities which existed prior to 1971. The situation has not changed much till date.

Kyaligonza (2009) further found that public universities in Uganda are failing to fully fulfill the functions of higher education as they lag behind in research, while emphasizing teaching at the expense of research. Even, government is not very serious in investing in university research as it lays little premium on the need to properly remunerate and motivate research supervisors, acquire research equipment and facilities like computers, internet facilities, libraries and workshop facilities as well as deliberately fund research.

Kyaligonza (2009) citing Mugerwa (2003) and Mamdani (2007) notes the disproportionate number of teaching and non-teaching staff. Academic staff members usually carry heavy teaching work load and teach large classes, thus finding it hard to conduct meaningful research or effectively supervise student research projects. It could be concluded that large class sizes keep lecturers busy even between semesters with large numbers of scripts running into another semester and sometimes into another session due to short breaks and multiple admissions.

As for community services, the United Nations (UN) and Africa’s New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD) have echoed the need for Universities and higher education institutions in Africa to implement curricula that produce a new generation of all-round graduates with blended entrepreneurial, vocational and intellectual competences to act as nuclei for change. Universities have a social obligation for knowledge generation and transfer. Transformation of knowledge and technologies for use by society particularly in liaison with the private sector should be a commitment for each university.

**NULL HYPOTHESIS**

The null hypothesis tested in this study delved on no significant difference in the level of educational services in respect to CBS expectations.

**METHODOLOGY**

The study employed the ex post facto and descriptive comparative strategies, the data were collected using a researcher devised questionnaires with items on educational services. A minimum sample size of 775 respondents was determined using the Sloven’s formula. A purposive sampling was utilized to select the respondents of the study. This involved finding any CBS in a lecture room, computer laboratory, resting place at a university campus and requesting them to participate in the study. The request involved self-introduction and soliciting students’ cooperation by explaining the objective of the study. Any CBS who accepted was selected to fill in the questionnaire. Cronbach’s alpha coefficient test revealed that the questionnaire was reliable at (α = 0.947). The data were analyzed using summary statistics, such as means and ranks, while the null hypothesis was tested using t-test and analysis of variance (ANOVA).
FINDINGS

Table 1: Levels of Educational Services in Regard to Quality of Teaching, Research and Community Services

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Educational Services</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Interpretation</th>
<th>Rank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Research</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of teaching</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Service</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>AVERAGE MEAN</strong></td>
<td><strong>2.7</strong></td>
<td><strong>Satisfactory</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 gives a summary of mean scores on CBS expectations in accordance to educational services. It is clear that research (mean = 2.9) was rated as the most satisfactory in meeting the CBS expectations and thus ranked number one, followed by quality of teaching. On contrary, community service (mean = 2.6) was the least ranked implying that universities have not attached strong emphasis on this core service. Therefore, since all universities acknowledge that community service (NCHE, 2005) is a corner stone in their existence, it should therefore be accorded due diligence.

CONCLUSIONS

The overall level of educational services in both public and private universities in Uganda was rated satisfactory in accordance with CBS expectations. However, in regard to community service, specific items such as; dissemination of research findings, universities having an ongoing community service scheme and offering free professional consultancy services were rated unsatisfactory and thus not meeting CBS’ expectations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Universities should disseminate their research findings to community, establish an ongoing community service scheme and offer free professional consultancy services to the nearby community.
- Universities should endeavor to promote students’ research through establishment of a research fund. This will attract supervisors to concentrate on students’ projects and also foster collaborative research between supervisors and students.
- It should also be noted that on almost all items measuring the level of educational services, the rating was satisfactory. This means that universities should strategically review these indicators and establish possible ways of improving on them.

REFERENCES